



North side of the square circa 1940



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\* - indicates use of historic photo

The buildings shown here are representative and are not intended to be an exhaustive list of historic resources in the district.

## A Walk Through the Courthouse Square Historic District

Historic Tour Guide No. 2



City of Bloomington, Indiana



### Courthouse Square

In 1818 the county agent was ordered to lay out a public square 276 feet on each side with streets 82 1/2 feet wide. The original town stretched four blocks east and west of the square and two blocks north and south. Streets immediately surrounding the square were then named, quite logically, West Main (now College), East Main (Walnut), North Main (Sixth), and South Main (Kirkwood). Laid out in what is now known as the "Shelbyville Plan," cross streets intersect at the corners of the square. A small log structure was the first of three courthouses built in the center of the square; the final and present courthouse has been standing since 1907. The lots surrounding the square were sold at public auction on June 22, 1818. By the following January, thirty families had taken up residence and established stores, taverns, and industries.

Early businesses supported only the local agricultural and daily needs of the community. The Seward Foundry, an early blacksmith shop that started in 1822 at 7<sup>th</sup> and Walnut, continued operation until the 1980's. Austin Seward is known for creating the fish weathervane that has topped every courthouse since 1826. Tanneries, lumber, woolen and grist mills, and distilleries were other early businesses. As stagecoach routes, canals, rail lines and highways were established through the years, industries flourished and markets expanded as trade possibilities to and from Bloomington increased. The Showers Brothers Furniture Factory was originally founded on the eastside of the square as a coffin and bedstead manufacturer in 1856. By 1912 it had grown into the largest furniture factory in the world, relocating to a new building at 8<sup>th</sup> and Morton Street now reused as City Hall. Wick's Bee Hive, a department store operating from 1891 to 1976, took up various posts along the North side of the square during its long existence. Faris' Market, started in 1923 and located on North Walnut, is the only store left from a time when grocers, meat markets, bakeries, five-and-dimes, department stores, and other commercial services lined the square to supply local residents.

Many hotels also opened in the downtown area with construction of a new passenger rail station on Gentry Street. Although now reused, the Bundy European Hotel and the Faulkner Hotel still stand, along with the grandest of them, the Graham. Through the years downtown became a center for entertainment with festivities revolving around rough saloons, Masonic ceremonies, restaurants, plays or recitations in various auditoriums, and eventually, movie theatres. The tradition continues today with many live music venues, bars, restaurants, specialty shops, and annual events creating the public downtown experience.

In 1984, the Commission for Bloomington Downtown (now Downtown Bloomington Commission) was incorporated with the mission to revitalize downtown. Its highest priority was "preservation of the integrity and uniqueness of the square, one of the few substantially unaltered, turn-of-the-century squares remaining in Indiana." In 1986, the Commission became a certified National Main Street organization and the city a graduate partner in the Indiana Main Street program. Incorporating the Main Street program's four-point approach of organization, promotion, design, and economic restructuring, revitalization conferences were held, similar programs in other cities were examined, zoning was modified to encourage downtown housing, and restoration were also established including Curb and Sidewalk, Street Tree, Downtown Loan, Façade Design, and Tax Abatement. Over \$40 million in public and private investments were made in downtown as the city's historic buildings were restored, reused and redeveloped.

One of the earliest local tax abatement projects involved the Graham Hotel, redeveloped as office space in 1984 by CFC, Inc. Federal historic tax credit projects redeveloped the Fee, Sudbury and Wicks Buildings, Vance Music Building, Howe Building, Harp Motors Sales Co. Building, Allen Building, the Knights of Phythias Building, and the Princess and Buskirk-Chumley/Indiana Theaters. The largest single project, again taken on by CFC, Inc., was reuse of all buildings on the south side of the square facing Kirkwood Street. As the buildings were found unstable, the facades were retained while the interior structures were rebuilt as one unit. Now a collection of shops and offices in a mall format, the building is collectively called Fountain Square Mall.

The Courthouse Square Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in December 1990. Four buildings within the district are individually listed on the National Register—the courthouse, the Princess Theatre, the Wicks Building, and the old City Hall. More information on the Courthouse Square and a copy of the National Register nomination is available in the Indiana Room of the Monroe County Public Library.

### No. 2 Courthouse Square



Local funding initiative programs for revitalization and restoration were also established including Curb and Sidewalk, Street Tree, Downtown Loan, Façade Design, and Tax Abatement. Over \$40 million in public and private investments were made in downtown as the city's historic buildings were restored, reused and redeveloped.



**\*1. Waldron Block**  
**100 West 6th**  
**c. 1867**

Pictured as it appeared in the 1930's, this building once housed Joe Natale's "Dixie Market." Natale's market moved from an open stand near the Harris Grand Theater, and took its name from the highway that ran through the city from Florida to Canada. The Central Union Phone exchange was once located on the second floor. Today, only the rounded hood molds on the east side of the building reflect its Italianate styling.



**2. Vance Music Building**  
**112 West 6th**  
**c. 1910**

One of the stately neoclassical retail buildings on the square, the Vance Building was recently uncovered after being obscured by a large painted billboard for many years. Once considered part of the "Wicks Block" it housed the eastern section of the "Wicks BeeHive" an early locally owned department store. Later, it was occupied by Clayton's Cigar Store, The Rendezvous Café, Dixie Liquors, and a series of furniture stores, one of which a former mayor of Bloomington owned: "The Buck Lemon Furniture Store".



**3. Fee, Sudbury and Wicks Buildings**  
**122, 118, and 116 West 6th /1853, 1873 and 1891/1921**

Drygoods and department stores have operated at the corner of 6th and College since the 1850's. A perennial local favorite, the "Wicks Beehive" store located at 116 was remodeled in 1926, with Bloomington's only Chicago commercial style facade. The limestone facade features wrought iron spandrels and fluted piers and covers two original buildings. The brick Sudbury Building once housed the Kappa Alpha Phi fraternity where Hoagy Carmichael and his friends gathered to play informally.



**\*4. Old Post Office**  
**119 West 7th**  
**c. 1915**

One of several local Beaux-Arts style civic buildings built in the second decade of the twentieth century. Characteristic Beaux Arts decorations such as cartouche and garlands surround the main entrance, which once faced College Ave. The building was remodeled in 1989 and replacement windows and a standing seam metal roof were added.



**4. Masonic Temple**  
**120 West 7th**  
**c. 1915**

Beaux-Arts in symmetry but Egyptian Revival in detail, this large civic building has a stepped pyramidal roof with an unusual ornate urn at its pinnacle. In 1985 several windows were cut into the facade of this once fortress-like masonic building.



**5. Graham Hotel Building**  
**201-205 North College**  
**1929**

Three hotels have occupied the corner of College and 6th since 1895, the Gentry, the Bowles and in 1929, the Graham Hotel. Built by a prominent 1920's entrepreneur, who also owned the auto dealership now used as the convention center, the Graham hosted many celebrities through the years, including Gloria Swanson, Jeanette MacDonald and Bette Davis, and was the site of many important local soirees and celebrations.



**\*6. Howe Building**  
**123-125 North College**  
**1893**

Perhaps Bloomington's finest pressed metal trim decorates this building. An Eastlake influence is seen in the sunburst frieze and heavy scrolled window hoods. A restoration in 1996 guided by the Secretary of the Interior's Standards, removed a large sign that once obscured the storefront.



**7. J.C. Penney Building**  
**115 North College**  
**1931 (façade)**

This art deco facade covers three earlier brick buildings that are clearly visible from the rear. On the inside a pressed tin ceiling from this earlier era remains. A leaded clerestory tops the store front windows. Now a collection of shops and offices in a mall format, the building is called the Uptown Plaza.



**\*9. Kresge Building**  
**101 North College**  
**c. 1915**

Built as part of a chain of 5 and 10 cent stores popular in the early Twentieth Century, this classical revival storefront retains much of its original integrity. The College Avenue facade is bracketed by fluted pilasters topped by urns and crossed by a course of block modillions.



**10. Bundy European Hotel**  
**214-216 West Kirkwood**  
**c. 1890**

The first known occupancy of this building was the Bundy European Hotel. Located a block east of the Monon passenger station, a series of taverns and boarding house tenants occupied this site. The building features a cast iron front and a pressed metal cornice. The east side of the building was once called the "Theatrorium," a nickelodeon that showed movies.



**11. Benckart Building**  
**112-114 South College**  
**1890**

In 1878 George W. Benckart bought the Orchard Inn on this site and continued a bakery business already established. In October of 1888, the entire half block south of the alley burned down. The Benckart bakery business rebuilt on this site and its old brick oven is still intact.



**\*12. Hare Motor Sales Co. Building**  
**212-214 West 4th**  
**1929**

Various businesses have occupied the site, which began as a Harness Shop and Shoe Repair in 1909. In 1929, a unified limestone facade joined two separate ca. 1890 buildings into the Hare Motor Sales Co. Clyde W. Hare sold Packards in this new limestone and brick storefront until 1934.



**13. Old First National Bank**  
**121-125 West Kirkwood**  
**1907**

This Classical Revival corner building was designed by John Nichols in a tour de force of limestone ornamentation including classical pilasters, dentils, modillions and rockfaced and dressed limestone courses. First National Bank located on this site in 1871 and built the current building in 1907. As part of the extensive work done on the south side of the square by CFC, it was restored in 1987.



**14. Buskirk Hill/Kahn Building**  
**112-114 West Kirkwood**  
**1895**

Kahn's Clothing Store was one of the longest operating businesses in the downtown. Founded by Moses Kahn in 1866, it remained in operation until 1985. In 1898 the Knights of Pythias and the Rathbone Sisters moved into the third floor of this building and named it "Castle Hall." The eclectic style with its projecting stacked bay windows, shaped shingles and curvilinear parapet is distinctive.



**\*15. Mendelssohn Hall**  
**103-105 West Kirkwood**  
**1868-1915**

The Old Opera House is undoubtedly the oldest building on the south side of the square and has an illustrious past. Originally built with a large 2nd floor room boasting 18 foot ceilings, the Showers and Hendrix Furniture and Casket Company used the area as a showroom until 1872. Shortly thereafter, the Mendelssohn Society brought many shows to this location, including one featuring James Whitcomb Riley. H.B. Gentry opened his circus career, the Dog and Pony Show, at the Opera House in 1887 then went on to head the world famous Gentry Brothers Circus.



**\*16. Old City Hall**  
**122 South Walnut**  
**1915**

The 1915 Bloomington City Hall was the city's first and only building built to house the municipal government. It also conjoined the police and fire departments within the same structure. City Hall was designed in the beaux-arts style that had become very popular in institutional construction of the early twentieth century. In 1992, the building was restored for its new use, the John Waldron Arts Center.



**\*17. Allen Building**  
**102-104 East Kirkwood**  
**1907**

The Bloomington National Bank was the first to occupy the Allen Building, which has had a variety of retail and office uses through the years. A mixture of commercial styles it shows the influence of both Queen Anne and Classical Revival styles in its complex massing, dentilled cornice, Ionic pilasters and pedimented gables. Original leaded clerestories and pressed tin ceilings are still visible at the Uptown Café, which has become a noted watering hole for Bloomington's movers and shakers.



**18. Odd Fellows Hall**  
**108-110 East Kirkwood**  
**1913**

In many ways a typical masonic building, Odd Fellows Hall was originally built to serve a bakery use. The grain was stored on the second floor with the ovens in the basement. Later used by the Odd Fellows, the large rooms used for ceremony are still evident.



**\*19. Buskirk-Chumley Theater**  
**112 East Kirkwood**  
**1922**

Harry and Nova Vonderschmitt built the former Indiana Theatre for the cinema. Reflecting, as it did, the exotic appeal of the heyday of American movies, the theater is an eclectic mix of Spanish and Classical Revival styles. The memory of Hoagy Carmichael is also linked with the old Indiana. Substantial community effort led to its restoration and reuse by the city. It is now a performing arts venue.



**20. Old Monroe County State Bank**  
**100 North Walnut**  
**1888/1919**

Originally a drygoods store, this Italianate brick building was upgraded with a neoclassical limestone facade in order to house a bank. With its Eastlake style window hoods and pressed metal cornice, the building has good original integrity. The Book Corner is its long-term tenant.



**21. Knights of Pythias and "The Vogue"**  
**116 and 120 North Walnut**  
**1904 and 1923**

John Nichols designed the Knights of Pythias Building in a classical revival style. Recently restored and converted into apartments, the building's large masonic rooms were subdivided for residential use. Alfred Grindle redesigned the facade of The Vogue in an eclectic Spanish colonial style that features mosaic tiles set into stucco, wrought iron balconies and a barrel tile roof.



**22. Faulkner Hotel**  
**124 North Walnut**  
**1847**

Ranking as the oldest building on the square, this building has housed several hotel businesses including the Phillips(1878), the Walnut Street(1883), the Faulkner(1887), and the Bundy (1898). Earlier it was owned by Aquilla Rogers, a scion of one of the founding families of Bloomington.



**23. 108 East 6th**  
**c. 1915**

An interesting interpretation of the Spanish Colonial Revival style, this building's details are couched in the Arts and Crafts movement of the early twentieth century. The ornamental vigas, exposed rafters and shaped parapet wall are interesting features in a commercial structure.



**24. Old Odd Fellows Building**  
**200-202 North Walnut**  
**1892**

This housed one of the many grocery stores located on the square at the turn of the century. It was also the second location of the Odd Fellows fraternal organization, after starting in the Fee building and before its move to Kirkwood. The construction date of 1892 is located in the parapet of the pressed metal cornice.



**25. Princess Theatre**  
**206 North Walnut**  
**1892/1923**

Built as an office building, the first use of this space was the Monroe County State Bank. In 1913, Robert Harris converted its use to a theatre, of which, only the foyer and entry remain. In 1923, John Nichols redesigned its remarkable glaze polychrome facade and it remains Monroe County's only example of terra cotta.



**26. Faris Market**  
**208 North Walnut**  
**1895**

The oldest continually operating grocery in Monroe County occupies this building. The interior space looks much as it would have in the nineteenth century, with high pressed tin ceilings, diagonal wood floors and stocked shelves lining the walls. The Italianate brick building has a rusticated limestone first floor facade and a pressed tin cornice.

